

July 23, 2007

Mr. Phil Isenberg
Chair
Blue Ribbon Task Force

Dear Mr. Isenberg:

I am writing in response to the Delta Vision request for alternative visions for the California Delta.

Restore the Delta, the area's only grassroots organization working to ensure that the Delta is drinkable, swimmable, fishable and farmable by 2010, is writing in support of the In-Delta vision plan as presented by Tom Zuckerman.

We concur that restoring groundwater tables throughout the Central Valley invites an intriguing possibility for flood management and potential water storage of water that could be used for agricultural purposes, thereby reducing the demand for Delta exports. In addition, Restore the Delta strongly advocates for the development of water throughout California outside of the Delta watershed. We maintain that conservation, reclamation, desalinization, and recycling are the keys to meeting the states water needs without exporting every last drop of water from the California Delta in order to meet those needs.

Restore the Delta also supports a number of ideas as put forth in the Delta Vision proposal offered by Gary Bobker and other environmental groups. In recent work meetings with local Delta stakeholders, there was a definite consensus that reducing exports in order to move the salinity barrier further out from the Delta was crucial to the future of our region.

There was also consensus that studies could be pursued to see if flexible, opportunistic conveyance would improve water reliability for other parts of the state, while allowing for the restoration of fresh water flows throughout the Delta. But if such studies were to find that flexible conveyance would not improve water quality and fresh water flows throughout the Delta, then a permanent reduction in exports would become the primary condition on which we would predicate Delta restoration. Local Delta stakeholders would also need ironclad assurances that such a flexible conveyance system would not be altered into a permanent alternative conveyance system that would reroute Sacramento River water away from the Delta.

While there are definite differences between Mr. Zuckerman's and Mr. Bobker's visions, Restore the Delta knows that the answer for the Delta can be found in venerable environmental NGO's working in support of local Delta landowners and local Delta citizens. The California Delta can only be saved and sustained from a truly bottom up

approach toward its future with outside environmental groups adding their expertise to local efforts.

To clarify further, our vision for the Delta is predicated on the belief that the Delta is first and foremost an estuary. Second, it is an agricultural region deserving of protection. And last, only surplus water that is not essential for protecting the estuary and local agriculture can be shared with other parts of the state.

It is from this position that all other solutions to the Delta's ecological and infrastructure crisis should be derived. That is why Restore the Delta believes that a conservancy, created and governed primarily by local Delta interests, is essential to creating the necessary programs for ecological and levee restoration that could tackle the problems associated with subsidence, water quality, seismic threat, and sea level rise.

Again and again, we have heard throughout the Delta Vision process that nobody wants to be bogged down in a conversation regarding governance of the Delta. Restore the Delta, nonetheless, insists that the present governance structure, which does not give authority to one governing body responsible for the Delta, is one of the primary reasons that the Delta is in its present crisis. Numerous state and federal laws, which if enforced by one governing agency, could go a long way toward solving the region's water quality and infrastructure problems.

Last, while some may see Restore the Delta as reactionary in its opposition to the idea of permanent alternative conveyance (a.k.a. peripheral canal) we prefer to describe our position as highly recalcitrant. We agree with NRDC's most recent letter to Governor Schwarzenegger on the conditions that would have to be addressed before a discussion of the peripheral canal could be entertained. We find Governor Schwarzenegger's water plan as put forth this last week as premature and inconclusive in recognizing the needs of Delta communities and Delta fisheries in relation to alternative conveyance. We believe that his plan will not return the best and most ecologically sound water yield per dollar spent.

Restore the Delta will be compiling Mr. Zuckerman's work along with the work of other local water districts and our environmental partners into a Healthy Delta Communities Plan over the next thirty days. This document will further articulate our plan for the future of our home, our communities, and our region. We will make this document available to you at that time.

Thank you for your consideration of our vision and views for the future of the California Delta.

Respectfully yours,

Barbara Barrigan-Parrilla
Campaign Director
Restore the Delta